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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to determine how individuals at community colleges made sense of organizational change, specifically with respect to the identification of external and internal forces of change. Interviews were conducted with over 200 administrators, board members, faculty, staff, and students at 6 community colleges in the United States and Canada, focusing on issues related to institutional change and economic, political, and social forces driving change. In addition, college and board meetings were observed and informal meetings were held with faculty and administrators. Based on the interviews, the following five observations were made: (1) managers were limited in the objective manipulation of the environment, functioning instead symbolically to manipulate and manage institutional interpretations of events; (2) a college's organizational context (its particular system identity) was a main influence, with colleges in loosely controlled systems exhibiting greater control than those in tightly managed systems; (3) the more college personnel assumed that a strong system existed, the less control they perceived that their college had over its own actions; (4) colleges that responded to environmental changes chose strategies that fit their institutional self-perceptions, while those that ignored changes saw them as inconsistent with their identity; and (5) internal influences over organizational change were contained within the organization's existing structures, combining these with institutional history, culture, and symbols as well as the organization's stage of development. (Contains 16 references.) (BCY)

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Sense-making in the community college: the meanings of organizational change[1]

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Sense-making in the community college: the meanings of organizational change[1]

Introduction

Organizational change in the community college is conveyed by story telling: through descriptions and explanations that organizational members give to make sense not only of their organization but also of the relationship between the organization and its environment. This article examines the descriptions and explanations of organizational members in community colleges, which portray change in the institution and identify sources and precipitators of change.

Members and external stakeholders of organizations endeavor to make sense of organizational actions and events: they tell stories that either explain these phenomena or that fit into an existing framework of understanding (Astley, 1985). How and why organizations change are conundrums of organizational theory. Foremost among these conundrums is the tension that exists between external determination and internal direction of change (Pfeffer, 1982).

On the one hand, organizational stories depict the organization as acted upon by external forces to the extent that these forces either determine organizational actions or are more compatible with particular organizational forms and actions than with others. On the other hand, stories describe organizations through the actions of managers who interpret external environments and choose actions, which will lead to the fulfillment of organizational goals. One story line suggests that organizations are inherently

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programmed, destined by history and by organizational structure to act. The other suggests that organizations are rational, intentional, and ordered, products of individual and group action (Becher and Kogan, 1992; Bennis, 1989; Crouch, Sinclair, and Hintz, 1992; Dutton and Dukerich, 1991; Hasenfeld, 1983). Not surprisingly, entire theoretical frameworks for the examination of organizations are grounded in the assumption of internal direction and others in the assumption of external control (Dutton and Dukerich, 1991). But, organizational behaviors and actions do not conveniently fit into one category or the other.

Broad appeals for organizational change are endemic in organizational literature, and this is especially the case for the past two decades. Such appeals are based upon assumptions that are questionable. These include the assumption that powerful leaders can alter existing patterns of organizational life and change how organizations act. They also include the assumption that radical or transformative change is if not commonplace then at least desirable. Ignored in such assumptions are not only the views that reject organizations as rational and controllable entities but also the judgement that forces promoting change outweigh those promoting stability and homeostasis (Hasenfeld, 1983; Mintzberg, 1994).

These assumptions are central to the literature on the community college over the past two decades. Advocates of the community college present the institution as the premier educational innovator of the twentieth century: they refer to the growth of these institutions and their ability to adapt through what is called "innovation" (Frye, 1994). Those critical of the institution characterize the community college as either in need of

alteration in order to improve its performance or failing to live up to its promise because it has strayed from its traditional values (Cohen and Brawer, 1996; Dougherty, 1994; Frye, 1994; McGrath and Spear, 1991). Yet, the assumptions that community colleges are rational organizations that can be guided and directed by managers and designers in mechanistic fashion (Mintzberg, 1994; Morgan, 1986) ignore not only the human and unpredictable side of organizational life but also the social and political side of organizations where meanings are constructed and negotiated. There is evidence to suggest that community colleges more so than elite universities or four-year colleges possess characteristics such as administrative dominance and environmental vulnerability (Baldridge, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley, 1978; Birnbaum, 1988). Nonetheless, there is little empirical evidence to indicate that community colleges are more internally directed than other organizations or that managers are strategists, acting to position their institutions favorably or adapting them to their advantage.

Research design

An in-depth multiple case study investigation was chosen as the most suitable way to gain knowledge of college sense making and behaviors but as well to capture meaning and behaviors at more than one college. Thus several sites/colleges make up the multiple cases, and the use of more than one site permits comparisons and offers additional possibilities for generalization and even theory construction. The investigative strategy was to study multiple sites in depth through interviews and informal conversations with college personnel and students. In order to understand how institutional members interpret the external environment and the ways in which organizational actions are

explained by organizational members considerable in-depth knowledge of an institution is necessary. Moreover, to gain understanding of different institutional contexts, multiple sites or cases are most appropriate (Hardy, 1996). The use of field methods--including document analysis, interviews, informal conversations, observations, and the use of informants--is one suggested way to understand organizational life and organizational behaviors. Depth of understanding and limitations of time reasonably limit the sample size--with approximately 1200 U. S. community colleges and 125 Canadian colleges, even to achieve a high level statistical confidence would require more colleges visited than would be feasible. The purpose here is not to achieve statistical generalizations but rather theoretical soundness (Yin, 1984).

Site Selection

The choice of sites followed two basic patterns. The first was along the lines of theoretical or purposeful sampling. The second is associated with site access. Purposeful sampling consists of choosing a sample of a population (in this case, community colleges) which fit characteristics of the study's purpose and which may conform to working hypotheses.

Additionally, in order to provide cases which are not identical to each other and which reflect as a whole a variety of other sites, the sample pool was further refined to include different organizational systems (e.g., colleges which are part of a multi-college district, colleges which are part of a larger educational system, colleges which are "stand alone"), different political jurisdictions (i.e., U. S. and Canada on one level; different states and provinces on another), and different sized institutions because of the widely held view

of organizations that size is related to complexity and that differences between organizations can be a factor of size differences, primarily. Thus the sample pool was limited conceptually.

The second aspect of access is perhaps more subjective and personal. From the sample pool, colleges where there was known opportunity for access because of my familiarity of a college official who might be able to open the gate were the initial choices. Six colleges were originally identified from a larger list. The total list was comprised of 15 colleges, including several institutions within a multi-college district. One of the six was dropped from the list because I became aware of internal upheaval and the impending departure of the college president. Another college was added in its place--a college within the same geographical region--because of the interest and willingness of the college president to participate. Another college was eventually dropped from the list because of a laborious process to achieve college agreement to participate. This college was replaced by a college in a different geographical region, but only after I had exhausted possibilities of replacement with another college in that region. The final choice of replacement in this example was not only based upon access but also upon the conceptual appropriateness of the college's character as an innovative institution which was reputed to be involved in new educational technologies. Ultimately, six (6) colleges were selected. Four to eight is arguably a reasonable number of sites for multi-case study research (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Procedures

This investigation began in the late Spring of 1996. Colleges which agreed to participate in the study were sent formal documents on the investigation, including an

agreement to have their college included in the study, an agreement which was signed by the chief executive officer of the institution. Additionally, colleges were assured that permission from employees would be gained through a consent form and also that anonymity of institutions would be maintained as the colleges would be given fictitious names in reports and publications.

Arrangements were made for site visits, and a team of researchers was established, including U.S. and Canadian members. Of these members, two were university professors and four were doctoral students in university programs.

The research team spent from four to five days at each site. During this time, team members conducted individual and group interviews. At each institution, the following college personnel were interviewed: president or chief executive officer, president's assistant or secretary, chief business officer, chief academic officer, chief student services officer, chief human resources/personnel officer, mid-level administrators (deans, directors), full time faculty, part-time faculty, faculty union president, support staff union president, and 1-2 board members (if available, the board chair was interviewed). In some of the colleges, student government executive members were interviewed. Additionally, if a college was part of a multi-college district, the district chancellor was interviewed. As well as formally arranged interviews, more informal interviews and conversations were held with administrators, faculty (full time and part time), support staff, and students.

Formal interviews were taped recorded, unless objected to or inappropriate because of location (e.g., one interview was conducted over lunch in a restaurant), and interview notes were recorded by hand. Interview questions were developed and pilot

tested prior to site visits. Many of these questions were open-ended and invited interviewees to elaborate on and explain their responses. Following site investigations, research assistants transcribed interview data; I also reviewed the entire interview data set and then analyzed the interview data using pattern coding (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

During site visits, as principal investigator, I used a participant observation approach to data collection and analysis (Berg, 1995; Burgess, 1984). I attended board meetings, administrative meetings, and open college meetings. Additionally, I toured facilities, met informally with faculty and administrators, and situated myself in specific locations on campus, frequently the cafeteria, to observe. Other members of the research team also followed this pattern. At the conclusion of each day on site, team members discussed their observations and findings.

During all site visits, I kept a journal that included notes from meetings, interviews, and observations of institutional environments and interactions. As well, I made notes on my ongoing analysis of data and the generation of observations and working hypotheses. This journal provided me with observational data, separate from interview data, as well as a "memoing" document (Miles & Huberman, 1984) where I could review my conceptual understandings during site visits.

Data Sources and Data

Data include the following:

1. Tape recorded interviews of institutional members, including administrators, board members, faculty, support staff, and students;
2. Interview notes of field researchers based upon interviews and conversations with college personnel, students, and board members;
3. Field notes of researchers; and,
4. Journal of principal investigator, comprised of descriptions, observations and hypotheses recorded during site investigations.

This examination is based upon interviews with over 200 administrators, faculty, staff, students, and board members at six community colleges in the U. S. and Canada during 1996 and 1997. In analyzing these interviews, I use a cultural framework that explores both sense making of organizational members and the meanings suggested by members' articulations. That is, how do organizational members understand organizational change in their institution and what are the explanations for these understandings?

Organizational members included college board members, the chief executive officer, or president, senior administrators including vice presidents and deans, departmental chairs, faculty, both full-time and part-time from various instruction and service areas, support staff, and students including student government officials, and full-time and part-time students.

Interviews covered topics related to institutional change, with emphasis upon large, macro, external forces such as economic, political, and social forces. For example, the role of government in influencing the institution was explored as was the role of local communities. Interviews were analyzed through identification and explication of responses which suggested either internal or external forces of change. In particular, the first phase of my analysis involved the coding of interview data based upon pattern coding (Miles and Huberman, 1984). I highlighted major changes identified at each institution and connected organizational members' explanations to these changes. A portion of these data are displayed in Tables 1-6.

The Institutions

All six institutions are located in the Western U.S. or Western Canada. These institutions as a whole reflect a variety of characteristics--size, location, programming, structure--that not only might account for a number of variables of change but also might permit generalizability. For the purpose of maintaining anonymity of each college, I have given the institutions fictitious names. The six colleges are named as follows: City Central College (CCC); East Shoreline College (ESC); City South Community College (CSCC); Pacific Suburban Community College (PSCC); Rural Valley College (RVC): and Suburban Valley Community College (SVCC).

City Central College is a large institution in the heart of an urban environment. The college has a curricular emphasis upon vocational training and adult basic education. For much of its history, the college had a third campus, but a few years prior to this investigation, that campus separated and became an independent college.

East Shoreline College is a mid-sized college, located between two major population centers. The college has one major campus and several regional campuses. In the late 1980s, the college's curricula shifted from a balanced emphasis among academic, vocational, and adult basic education to a dominant emphasis upon academic education. In the 1990s, the college developed several baccalaureate degree programs.

City South Community College is a relatively small city college, part of a large urban district community college system. The college has one campus, with an emphasis on vocational training, adult basic education, and English as a Second Language, with aspirations to increase its academic programming.

Pacific Suburban Community College is a single campus college, part of a larger state university and community college system. It is a mid-sized college, specializing in academic programs and several high profile two-year career programs. The college emphasizes its Pacific Rim orientation as well as its interdisciplinary programs.

Rural Valley College is a multi-campus college, with two major campuses, a smaller third center located with a secondary school and a community facility, and an even smaller fourth center in a rented facility in a small town. In the 1990s, the college began to develop baccalaureate degree programs, but continued to give considerable attention to adult basic education and other access oriented programs, such as English as a Second Language.

Suburban Valley Community College, with one campus, is part of a two college district, located in fairly affluent communities, adjacent to large urban centers. The college has a long-standing national reputation as an innovative institution, with emphasis upon academic programs, although recently there is growth in the program areas of adult basic education and English as a Second Language. Nonetheless, college resources support advanced technology-oriented programs.

Tales of two colleges: perceptual disjunctures

College #1. If you talk to the college president or the district chancellor, you have the sense that a revolution in education is underway. The district chancellor gesticulates, pointing the way to the future and explaining that the college is addressing the needs of new learners, those no longer interested in traditional content or traditional pedagogical methods. They want to be able to cope and succeed in the global environment. The

president of the college displays the diagram of the new structure of the college: organized not by departments or divisions but by communities, to model the customer and the customer's needs. There is no longer a visual image of school or college or academic departments here; instead the model is one of thematic organization, such as "Multicultural Studies", "Personal Success", and "Human Needs". These replace the units formerly called "Arts and Sciences", "Student Services", and "Human Resources". Both chancellor and president, as well as several senior managers, suggest these alterations arise from college responsiveness to external conditions and college strategy to maintain a leadership role among community colleges nation-wide. But there is a noticeable institutional disjuncture over this image.

First, faculty and other administrators portray a different image of the institution. This image is largely political in its emphasis: faculty and administration separateness; union and management conflicts; and friction among groups in the college over the mission of the institution.

Second, faculty and several administrators attribute change not to college responsiveness to the external environment but to the college leadership's motivation to maintain a specific image of the institution. David in Biology suggests that the college is trapped in its own rhetoric of an innovative institution and that its buildings, its equipment and its institutional spirit for improvement have deteriorated. An administrative colleague of David's says that the faculty will not compromise on quality and neither will they change their teaching approaches nor embrace new technologies. Another administrator harkens back to the past of the college when productivity was high and interpersonal

relations where foremost. Fear has replaced collegiality, fear about losing jobs in the face of new management priorities and practices.

Unlike the college president and district chancellor, these college members have little to say about the external environment: they are fully occupied with the internal college. Change for them is what has been lost from the past, and they are just as fervent about their image of the past and its qualities as the president and chancellor are about the future.

College #2. The college president reads from the college's revised mission statement to underline the college's intentions to emphasize its local orientation: to meet the needs of ordinary, adult community members, for basic education, skill and job training, and for career preparation. He cites evidence of declining government financial support, new populations in need of specialized training, and a more highly competitive and global marketplace as the forces acting upon the college. A long serving faculty member who performs an administrative role at the college explains that the institution is outdated technologically and programmatically and has become an adult training institution. There is no choice here, he claims, our faculty and our administrators are "living in the 19th century, a bunch of Luddites." A group of administrators at the college indicate that their time is consumed with meetings, largely with other administrators, that they have "no time for their work," and that they are unsure of what or whom they are managing. The disjuncture here is about perceptions among organizational members and about what gives rise to institutional change.

The Theme of External Determinism

A substantial portion of the descriptions and explanations of college members about organizational change favors the role of the external environment. At City Central College, government intervention, government funding behaviors, government policies, particularly social policy, and other government and agency actions are viewed as precipitators of organizational change. The government is accused of "micro-managing" the institution, as "buffering" the institution from the marketplace, and of affecting the institution with its practices of social equality.

> Changes originate from...government funding patterns [and from] other government programs--that is, deinstitutionalizing mental health clients and moving them into the community, integrating disabled students into primary and secondary education classes and then the expectation is that they will move into postsecondary institutions. (Adult basic education administrator)

East Shoreline College organizational members decry government funding policy, which does not support the kind of growth that the college is experiencing. Thus, the college has become increasingly market-oriented, pursuing resources through international contracts and through profitmaking tuition charges to foreign students. At City South Community College organizational members identify the district chief executive officer, the system Chancellor, as one of the primary sources of organizational change, from restructuring of the institution to micromanaging its operations. Faculty and administrators at Pacific Suburban Community College frequently refer to the actions of the community college system chancellor and the university system president as affecting college behaviors (both community college and university are part of one higher education

system). For example, their decision to move basic or remedial education programming from credit to non-credit affected the college in several ways, not least among these was higher tuition for students and a changed professional status and salary for faculty involved in the program. Both faculty and administrators at Suburban Valley Community College describe the district chancellor and the vice chancellors as powerful forces attempting to form the future path of the college. In all cases of external influencers who are district administrators or government officials, college members see these influencers as malevolent forces, acting upon their institution in a negative way.

Less personal attributions are also noted as influences of the external environment. Organizational members at Pacific Suburban Community College focus upon the state's economy, driven by tourism, as the critical factor of organizational action and change: a recent downturn in the tourist industry is directly connected to not only constraints on budgets but also to loss of staff positions and movement of programs from credit based to non-credit based so that they can become self-funded. Rural Valley College faculty and administrators cite the provincial faculty union and government relations and subsequent actions as key determiners of the destiny of the college; in particular, the two parties forged a provincial wide collective bargaining agreement that places considerable stress upon the college's budget. Faculty, administrators, and the chair of the board of governors at Suburban Valley Community College reiterate that the image of the college as an outstanding institution and nationally acclaimed community college has driven the college to emphasize high technology, constrain growth in the academic and basic education

areas, and devote major resources to facilities and equipment that support an innovative, high technology image.

College officials--administrators, faculty and support staff--speak with certainty about their changing student populations. New immigrants and refugees, secondary school "drop-outs", welfare participants, returning workers and laid off workers, as well as an employed workforce requiring upgrading skills, comprise the community colleges, seemingly as the new majority. This population is viewed as stimulating major changes in the organization. At City South Community College, for example, the entire student services area of the college was re-organized, re-located, and re-furbished in order to provide "one stop services." The population is also characterized as highly diverse. Growth in English as a Second Language programs and adult basic education are attributed to new immigrant populations located in proximity to the colleges.

Electronic technology is identified by college personnel as transforming: "the world will never be the same; connections are easier, cheaper, faster" (Information technology administrator). Faculty are viewed as divided into camps: those who embrace new technologies and see opportunities for innovation; those who are reluctant to alter what they do for fear of losing what they value. Groups of faculty and administrators at colleges connect new technologies with changing student demographics and student learning differences.

These technologies such as computers for word processing, voice-mail, electronic mail, communications and broadcast technologies have not only altered delivery of instruction, most notably in self-paced programming and distance education, but also re-

defined worker roles. Administrators and faculty work as their own support staff, lessening the need for clerical assistance, but at the same time accommodating a much larger personal workload than in the past. There are also stories at each institution about either the actual or impending elimination of support staff positions. Administrators, faculty, and support staff at City South Community College, in describing a recent restructuring of the institution, indicated that dozens of staff positions were eliminated in order to save money and "streamline operations". But, the net result was that administrators and other support staff took over the work formerly done by other staff.

The major recipients of new technologies are students. Personnel at every college claimed that electronic technologies were applied to student learning and services. Distance learning through the Internet and electronic mail, through two-way interactive video, and through satellite broadcast television enabled greater student access to programs. Communications technologies led to telephone and on-line registration, to on-line information about college processes, program and course requirements and curricula. Programs in writing both at the basic level and advanced composition level were areas most frequently cited as exploiting electronic technologies for student learning.

Numerous college employees at all colleges also indicated that expectations were considerable for their institutions to "keep up," to use new technologies, but that institutional resources and staff expertise were not keeping pace. Faculty and particularly administrators at Suburban Valley Community College stressed the point that unless their institution maintained its reputation as a leader in the use of electronic technologies, then students would go elsewhere. And loss of students means loss of government revenues.

The Theme of Internal Control

A parallel explanation of organizational change is found in the view of organizational members that individuals and groups within the institution are responsible for organizational actions. In some cases, individuals and groups are seen as preservers of traditions and practices; in other cases, they are viewed as resisters to progress; and, in other cases, they are viewed as agents of change. Faculty dominated bodies, such as senates or academic councils, are viewed as preservers of the traditions and values of the institutions, by both faculty and administrators. Local faculty unions and specific faculty groupings, by department or by longevity of service, are judged by both faculty and administrators as resisters to progress. And, specific administrators and faculty are viewed as agents of change.

The college president and the dean of instruction at Pacific Suburban Community College are noted, particularly by faculty, as agents of change: their biases in programming are evident to both administrators and faculty. At City South Community College, the president's approach to college decision-making, which is highly participatory and consultative, is contrasted by all employee groups to the former president's approach which was referred to as "autocratic," and is claimed to be a major change in how the college operates, underlining the importance of the formal campus leader in institutional actions. At City Central College, the governing board of the college is identified by all employee groups as a major influencer, not just in policy matters but also in what issues the college addresses and in adopting a pro-union stance. Faculty, support staff, and administrators at East Shoreline College view the faculty dominated academic council or

senate as the principal precipitator of fundamental change in how the institution is managed and in institutional processes. Formerly, and prior to the existence of a senate, the college was seen as managed and led by a group of senior administrators, headed by the college president; since the establishment of the senate, the entire administrative group including the senior executives take direction from the senate, and the college is increasingly viewed as an institution where there is co-management and shared governance. At Rural Valley College, the senior management group initiates change, although there are factions within this group which help to shape the implementation of college policy and operational decisions.

College administrators see themselves and are seen by other organizational members as strategists and decision-makers. Both positive and negative characterizations, such as altruistic and selfish connotations, accompany these attributions, although none are viewed as malevolent, unlike some of the external influencers.

Faculty bodies, particularly the faculty senate or the faculty dominated council, are viewed by all employee groups as the moral center of the institution, affecting organizational change by preserving traditions and values. Only at one college, East Shoreline College, where the academic council was viewed by all groups as a dominating force, did administrators question and criticize the influence of such a body.

Local faculty unions and faculty groups are viewed by all employee groups as influential, but primarily as resisters to change initiated or proposed by administrators. Local unions endeavor to preserve jobs and increase salaries, to curtail the influence of administrators as a group or as individuals, and to gain or maintain power over

organizational actions. Faculty groups, particularly those who have a long career at the college, spanning 20-30 years, are viewed by administrators as an opposing force, intent on protecting themselves and on resisting change.

Local unions that are district or system unions have less influence over management at the institution than autonomous unions. This is the case for Pacific Suburban Community College and City South Community College, where local faculty union officials have aligned themselves with the college administration in dealing with either a system or a district's influence. At Suburban Valley Community College, where union members are part of a district union, and district union leadership is housed on the Suburban Valley campus, there is no specific animosity expressed between union leadership and college administration. The union does not align itself with the college in reaction to the district, but has fewer words of disdain for college administrators than for district officers.

Table 1

City Center College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
Separation of one of three campuses, establishment of two separate colleges (1994), an action initiated by the Faculty union of one campus and formalized by government.	Internally initiated; Externally formalized	Narrowing of mission with loss of campus: no longer a university transfer program; emphasis upon job preparation and basic skills, such as English language.
Government legislation on governance (1996) that establishes an Education Council and alters governing board representation	External	Increase in local influence and local orientation of college
College board policies, behaviors and political	Internal	Changing college mission to greater emphasis upon

City Center College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
ideology		underserved; pro-union stance
Provincial Strategic Plan for Colleges and institutes (1996), developed by a multi-party steering committee and formalized by government	External	Emphasis upon productivity and efficiency
Provincial government funding policies and behaviors	External	Affects program offerings, limiting or eliminating some; creates "winners and losers"; changing organizational structures, especially management structures; affects labor relations; affects workload, employment conditions, and job security; college seeks other funding sources
New immigrant populations and the need for English language training	External	More attention directed to underserved, to English as a second language students and to human and student services

Table 2

City South Community College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
State funding: colleges permitted to retain tuition and fees (1995); funding allocation based upon full time equivalency students (FTEs)	External	Development of "one-stop" student services; increase in remedial and ESL students; increasing customer focus
Influence of two major employers and industries--aircraft and computer software	External	Programs driven by local industry; increase in information technologies (voice mail, local area networks, email),

City South Community College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
		with evident conflicts between those who support old way and those supporting new way
Re-structuring in 1995, led by former president and pushed by district chancellor; emphasis upon productivity	Internal	Greater use of technology; loss of staff and administrative positions; downsizing and amalgamation of departments; losing departmental identity; re-design of work, into teams resulted in over-work and bad feelings
Immigration, includes immigrants and refugees; changing demographics, including large Asian population	External	Alters and adds to programming, including intensive English training; more need for personal counseling and student services--"one stop" student services
New president's model of decision-making: participatory governance	Internal	Historical gap between faculty and administration, "big as Grand Canyon"
District chancellor, influence and longevity; central control	External	Decentralization of work but not responsibility; flattening of administration; convoluted relations between district office and college
Local economy: impact of international conditions; boom and bust	External	Programs reduced or shut-down

Table 3

East Shoreline College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
Baccalaureate degree	External	New programs--both

East Shoreline College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
granting status (1994)		academic (Arts and Sciences) and applied (Nursing); new faculty (Phds), university-type structures (e.g., research, ethics)
Provincial government funding: not keeping up with growth, since 1993	External	Administrative re-organizations; downsizing administration; more work with fewer people and less service to students
Behaviors of Educational Council, governing body	Internal	principal vehicle for institutional change; numerous committees and meetings
Provincial bargaining framework for faculty (1996)	Reduction in autonomy and de-centralization	Local union now subordinate to provincial union
International activities, such as recruitment of students	Internal	Addition of grades 11-12 high school; addition of ESL programs; avenue for faculty research and student placements
Provincial government Strategic Plan (1995)	External	Affects all areas, from funding/financing to programming: beginning of Key performance indicators; drives policy including government financing
External focus of president	Internal	Increased reliance upon vice-presidents for management, especially v.p. instruction; greater autonomy for units

Table 4

Pacific Suburban Community College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
Drop in tourism from Japan and California in early 1990s--serious recession;	External	Move remedial to non-credit; tuition fees rises over 75% between 1995-1999

Pacific Suburban Community College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
budget decreases in system; State recession		
University system, with Vice Chancellor as Community College Chancellor	External	Articulation agreement with the university (1995); one faculty union
Government control of funding, based upon revenues and politics	External	No change
College president and dean of instruction's behaviors	Internal	Change curriculum to have multicultural emphasis and increase in use of electronic technology in delivery and work
Electronic technology	External	Distributed learning in progress; changing work structures

Table 5

Rural Valley College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
Gov't funding behaviors--e.g. restricted funds	External	Increased growth in students with 1% funding cut; merging of departments; college more business-like
Gov't policy initiatives and strategic plan	External	Increase in distance ed.: on-line courses, interactive classes; increase in workload
Senior managers' behaviors	Internal	Shape college policy; lead college decisions
University College status	Internally promoted; externally formalized	New degree programs; wedge between vocational and academic groups; growth in Arts--Social Sciences and Humanities; shrinkage in other areas; new students; new faculty

Table 6

Suburban Valley Community College	Alterations	
Actions and conditions	**External/Internal**	**Outcomes**
College image: national reputation as innovative	External	Re-organization into learning communities; building of Advanced Technology Center; increase in distance education development and facilities
State funding, reductions and limitations, especially 1991	External	Reduction of work force in some areas; downsizing counseling; elimination of adult learning programs
Shared governance (state mandated)	External	Conflicts; breakdown; efforts to dismantle; speeds things up and slows things down; two decision structures--shared Gov. and administration
Location and growth--Silicon Valley, Northern California	External	Integration of technology into work and curriculum; integration of multiculturalism into curriculum and college operations and college life
College history	Internal	Conflicts between old and new organizational members; conflicts between board chair and union president
Chancellor	External	More business-like; more productivity oriented; less emphasis upon lower skills and more on technology Greater district influence and control; greater friction; union-management conflicts
Learning communities	Internal	Re-organization; efforts to change old structures; greater integration of some areas; break-up of old areas and relationships; change to content of curriculum, although largely talk

Explanations of Descriptions of Influence and Control

Several observations and hypotheses aid in explaining how organizational members describe influence and control in the colleges. First, managers are limited in the objective manipulation of the environment; instead they function symbolically, manipulating and managing institutional interpretations of events and meanings of organizational actions. For example, in the budgeting process, over 90% of college budgets are already committed, largely for employee salaries. The flexibility and influence of managers over expenditures is thus limited to small decisions. A college with a $30,000,000 budget has often less than $3,000,000 and more often between $200,000-$300,000 of discretionary funds. With multiple demands on the funds and numerous individual players and several interest groups involved, there are few actual dollars relative to the total budget that might contribute to change. Thus, managers are required to choose areas that are symbolic to support with limited funds if they are to exercise influence and be seen to control organizational actions. At Pacific Suburban Community College, the college president endeavors to commit discretionary funds to facilities improvement because the campus is regarded by the local community as well as by organizational members as a "beautiful campus," and this beauty is one if its outstanding characteristics. At Suburban Valley Community College, the college administrators debate over the use of discretionary funds, with the use of these to provide staff support for electronic technology because there is "state of the art equipment" but little expertise to support and service the equipment. If the college is to maintain its image as a leading institution in innovation, it cannot fall behind in its use of electronic technology.

Second, community colleges are part of a system of community colleges, other postsecondary institutions, other social and service organizations, and government agencies. Thus the context of the organization--its particular system identity--is a main contributor to its actions and to influence over actions. The looser the system, that is the more loosely coupled the system, the greater the internal control over organizational actions. Greater systems controls, whether through district central offices or through government agencies, suggest the stronger influence of the external environment on the institution. This is the case with Pacific Suburban Community College, part of a state community college and university system, where decisions from the state government and from the system central office frame and direct college actions. The clearest example of this is the decision to move adult basic education programs from credit to non-credit, a decision not made at the college level, and apparently not influenced by internal constituents.

Third, what follows from this view of systems influence are the importance of perception and the definition of institutional identity. The more the college personnel assume that there is a system and systems controls, then the less they will perceive their institution as having control over its own actions, or the ability to commit the institution to specific actions. This is clearly the case with City Central College where organizational members see an oppressive system in the form of an intrusive government, and where there are few areas of choice for the college in committing itself to actions. It has narrowed its mission not only to serve its local population but also because it has the ability to control this mission and its attendant goals.

Fourth, environmental changes either stimulate colleges to respond or are ignored by colleges through rationalizations. Colleges that respond choose strategies that fit their identity framework--how they are perceived and perceive themselves as institutions. These strategies thus serve to reinforce that identity if they are perceived as successful and contradict and even change that identity if they are perceived as unsuccessful. College decision-makers ignore environmental changes when they do not perceive themselves as capable of responding or because they see these changes as inconsistent with their present identity or the identity they may acquire by responding. Administrators at Suburban Valley Community College although sensing that their student population is altering and that there is growing demand for academic programs and English as a Second Language programs try to ignore or diminish the significance of these environmental alterations. Instead, the college administrators attend to the image of the college as an innovative, high technology institution and work at boosting college enrollments in technology-related fields.

Fifth, and finally, internal influences over organizational change are contained within existing structures combining these with institutional history, culture, and symbols as well as the organization's stage of development. This influence is not a conscious, rational choice of individual actors, but it may play out as an internal response to external forces that generate internal change. Constrained government funding and increasing demand for services lead Rural Valley College's administrators not to cut services, but to increase them by locating alternate sources of revenues. Rural Valley has a tradition of positive employee relations, few union grievances and almost no layoffs. To cut services

to match government revenues would mean reduction of the workforce, an action counter to the college's pattern of behavior. Thus, the college managers alter college operational philosophy to a more enterprising approach so that Rural Valley can maintain its mission of serving students. The college managers and faculty pursue international students to gain a profit, and college activity expands in the contract services area to garner additional revenues.

Conclusions

From these stories and explanations, it is clear that both the external and internal environments have roles in organizational change. Organizations are neither solely influenced and altered by external forces nor are they directed and controlled by internal managers, or other internal individuals or groups. The actions of organizations are neither totally determined by external forces nor fully influenced by internal forces. These stories and explanations as a whole suggest that organizational change is the interplay between external and internal forces, between the perceptions of internal members of organizational identity and the external environment and between the organizational fit with the external environment and organizational symbols that match environmental needs. Community colleges are not static organizations: they alter, change their approaches, their programs, and their relationship with their environment. But, they are not transformed institutions; they have not become another institution: they are neither universities nor secondary schools; they are neither corporations nor small businesses. They possess the attributes of many other organizations: they do so because on the one hand their external environment pushes them in that direction and on the other hand because in order to survive yet

maintain their purposes, community colleges themselves change course, adopt new approaches, new technologies, and new employees.

The descriptions and explanations of organizational members about their institution reflect the subjective and often shared meanings of organizational members that enable them to understand daily events and assist them with action (Morgan, 1986). These descriptions and explanations are like stories, told after the event or experience, in an attempt to fit these within a framework of understanding that gives sense to action. Explanations of organizational change in the community college, then, are sense making devices for members to shape the identity of their institutions.

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